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JUL 3 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER 151

SUBJECT: The Current Military Situation and Short
Term Prospects in North Laos

The CIA recently submitted to the Washington Special Action Group a report on the current military situation and short term prospects in north Laos. The major points in that report follow.

-- General Vang Pao, leader of the pro-government irregular troops in north Laos, began a counteroffensive in early June to retake certain points on the southern part of the Plain of Jars.

-- In so doing, he hopes to threaten the flank and rear of NVA forces operating southwest of the plain, thereby forcing them to pull back from that area. He also hopes to relieve enemy pressure in the vicinity of Bouam Long, an area which is important to his fellow Mes tribesmen.

-- So far, Vang Pao has failed to retake his initial target, which is still well defended by enemy forces. But he has seized another point on the southern part of the plain, which serves the same general objectives. As a result, elements of two enemy units have withdrawn to the southern part of the plain.

-- Vang Pao intends to reinforce positions he captures with Thai irregulars, thus freeing his own forces for further initiatives.

-- During the remainder of the rainy season Vang Pao will probably continue to maneuver flexibly and to exploit any tactical advantages he may develop in the process.

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-- No new enemy offensives are foreseen during this period. On the other hand, enemy forces are well entrenched and Vang Pao will probably not make as much headway as he did during the same period last year.

Comment. Vang Pao is proceeding with more flexibility than we had originally anticipated. His decision to bypass his original target in favor of a secondary objective was not fully coordinated with the CIA Station in Laos. However, the Station has reported that it would be unrealistic to expect Vang Pao to adhere to a rigid schedule. The CIA Station believes that his moves have been sound so far, and it promises to do its best to keep them that way.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

24 JUN 1971

WSAG PAPER

MEMORANDUM FOR:

✓ The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

The Honorable U. Alexis Johnson
Under Secretary of State for
Political Affairs

The Honorable David Packard
Deputy Secretary of Defense

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT:

Vang Pao's Objectives in Current
Operations On and Near the Plain
of Jars

1. In early March 1971 the Washington Special Action Group principals consented to three of four options proposed by our Vientiane Station for the employment of irregular troops in Military Region II to relieve the then-heavy enemy pressure on Long Tieng.

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2. On 3 June Vang Pao's forces began an offensive against Phou Seu and the southwest edges of the Plain along the lines envisaged in the approved three options. On 19 June, however, they seized Phou Teung against surprisingly light enemy opposition. At this point we asked our Vientiane Station for clarification of

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Vang Pao's objectives and plans in his current operations. The Station's 22 June response follows:

A. General Vang Pao's objectives have not changed by virtue of his current tactical moves on the Plain of Jars (PDJ). He is carrying out his originally announced intention of maneuvering his forces and adjusting to the developing tactical situation in order to threaten the flank and rear of the North Vietnamese (NVA) forces operating to the south and southwest of the PDJ. He thereby hopes to force the enemy to pull back from his present positions in order to meet this threat from the rear. Secondly, he hopes to divert enemy forces from the Bouam Long area where friendly forces have been under heavy enemy pressure.

B. Vang Pao's decision to move onto the southern part of the PDJ was made without seeking full Station concurrence, although the Station was informed prior to its execution. This move apparently caught the enemy by surprise, since reaction to the irregular maneuver, which outflanked elements of the 148th and 866th NVA Regiments, has been slow. Once on the PDJ the seizure of Phou Teung developed from the tactical situation. Its possession by friendly forces deprives the enemy of the major high point to the east from which he could threaten Vang Pao's forces on the PDJ. Although elements of the three Task Forces, charged with the capture of Phou Seu west of the Plain are approaching this objective, they have not yet taken it. With the enemy still in possession of Phou Seu, Vang Pao's situation on the Plain would be much less tenable should the enemy also control the high point of Phou Teung.

C. Vang Pao's primary concern at this time is Bouam Long and the 15,000 Meo civilians at that site and in the complex of villages to its west. Vang Pao's father-in-law, who is the military commander at Bouam Long, was wounded on 19 June and will be out of action for several weeks. His absence has already had a noticeable affect upon the morale of the local population. If the enemy pressure on Bouam Long does not decrease, Vang Pao may decide to drive further north on the Plain.

D. Given his current backing from the king and Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, Vang Pao, if able, would unquestionably seek to regain all of Xieng Khouang Province, but he knows he lacks both adequate forces and American support for such a move. His actions

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to date have outflanked the enemy, but have neither destroyed his forces nor materially damaged his supply caches. We doubt that Vang Pao can move very far from his present positions on the PDJ if significant enemy forces remain between him and Long Tieng. The enemy appears well dug in and determined to defend Phou Seu.

E. The Station believes that Vang Pao's moves have been sound and essentially conservative to date. He cannot, however, be expected to adhere to a rigid schedule in his fighting on the southern PDJ. He will have to take advantage of the weather when it is in his favor as it was on 19 and 20 June when he received over 250 TACAIR sorties. He is trying to retain the initiative and thereby force the enemy to react to his moves. He has succeeded to some extent in this objective. Elements of the 165th NVA Regiment are now operating on the southern PDJ, having redeployed from Hill 1663, 22 kilometers to the west. The 14th anti-aircraft NVA Battalion has also been ordered into an area 5 kilometers west of Phou Teung.

F. Looking ahead it is possible to anticipate some additional moves planned by Vang Pao contingent upon the success of current operations near Phou Seu. He informed Ambassador Godley and the CIA Station Chief on 20 June at Long Tieng that he planned to place [redacted] to hold that high point [redacted] for maneuver on the flatlands in the PDJ. [redacted] has concurred in this step. When Phou Seu is taken the two generals propose that [redacted] irregular battalion be brought in to man defensive positions along the Phou Seu ridge. Vang Pao has not raised the question of Xieng Khouangville and he is aware of American opposition to such a move.

G. Vang Pao believes he is operating within agreed parameters. He has made his own position clear, namely, that he cannot sit still in Long Tieng and await the next NVA onslaught in November. He is taking what he regards as militarily sound steps to protect himself. Buttressed as he is by the full backing of the Prime Minister [redacted] he will probably press to the fullest any local advantage he achieves on the PDJ.

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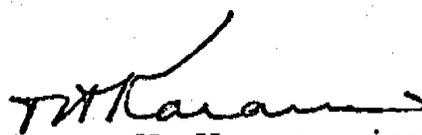
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H. As to new offensive initiatives, we do not foresee any under present circumstances. The enemy is not likely to cave in as he did in ABOUT FACE, although it is quite possible that Vang Pao will do him additional damage. If there should occur an unexpected break in the NVA seams, it is difficult to imagine him not attempting to exploit it. With negotiations once again in the wind, both Souvanna Phouma and Vang Pao will aim at an optimum bargaining position, although both profess skepticism concerning the probable outcome. We may surmise also that their inclination to push their luck as far as possible will be strengthened as a consequence of recent territorial losses in south Laos.

I. Vang Pao has - and it is unrealistic for us to attempt to deny him - considerable latitude within which he feels free to maneuver. We will continue to do our best to keep him within reasonable bounds consonant with his and our own capabilities. We will advise you as fully as possible in advance of any significant new initiatives he proposes, but we should recognize that the Royal Laos Government will continue to weigh its own equation of capabilities and limitations, aspirations and disappointments. Included in this equation is the comparative importance of the PDJ vis-a-vis the Ho Chi Minh trail and the balancing of territorial losses in South Laos against potential gains in the north.

3. We have quoted Vientiane Station's views at some length to provide the WSAG principals a fuller appreciation of the moves Vang Pao has already made and those he may yet try during the rainy season.


Thomas H. Karamessines
Deputy Director for Plans

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